

**Statement of
The Honorable Elijah Cummings
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Hearing On
“Mariner Education and Workforce”
October 17, 2007**

Today, our Subcommittee convenes to consider two inter-related topics that are of great importance to the future success of the maritime industry. Specifically, we will examine the nature, causes, and forecasts of labor shortages in the industry, and we will examine trends and innovations in maritime education.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, ports are the gateways through which 80 percent of our nation's foreign trade enters our country. Commerce in our nation's maritime sector accounts for approximately \$750 billion of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product. Waterborne trade, which totaled 2.3 billion metric tons in 2005, is increasing at a startling rate, and the growth in imported cargo, combined with our own domestic production, is creating freight volumes that are straining our transportation networks.

At the same time, significant changes continue to transform the experience of working in the maritime industry. No longer is the sailor's life necessarily one of adventure offering a young person the chance both to learn about sailing through on-the-job experiences at sea while occasionally spending weeks exploring port cities around the world. Deadlines and cost margins are tight and ships sail with the fewest possible number of crew members, who are expected to fulfill multiple duties while keeping regular watches, and who usually spend no more than a few hours in any port.

The significant changes occurring in the maritime industry appear to be contributing to labor shortages that, in turn, threaten to further strain the industry. The nature and extent of the shortages is not well-quantified and they appear to vary by type of mariner and type of vessel. An important part of our job today is to understand these shortages and to project their potential impact on the various segments of the U.S. maritime industry.

Based on data from the United States Maritime Administration, however, we know that the average age of a mariner with a Master's license is 51, while the average age of a Chief Engineer is 50. Figures also suggest that nearly 30 percent of inland mariners will be eligible to retire in the near future. There are likely many factors that can contribute to a labor shortage in the maritime industry, and just as the extent of the shortages is not known, the impact of each factor is difficult to assess.

Certainly the lifestyle associated with the maritime industry presents unique challenges. While the lure of the sea has been a siren song to many throughout the ages, many people are also lured by the call of home, and they may prefer to relax with their families at the end of the day rather than retire to a small cabin at the end of a hard shift. Wage differentials between jobs at sea and jobs on land may contribute to shortages, particularly when combined with the lifestyle challenges of life on the water.

Further, significant new standards for training and continuing education have been applied to mariners through the 1995 amendments to the Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping. These standards serve the critical goal of improving safety in the maritime industry and reducing human factors as the causes of maritime accidents, but they have also had the effect of imposing expensive and time-consuming training requirements on mariners, particularly on unlicensed mariners seeking to climb their way up the “hawse pipe” to command a ship.

There are certainly outstanding facilities in the United States that help train individuals to enter the maritime industry and to advance in their careers, such as the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training in Piney Point, Maryland, run by the Seafarers International Union, which I have had the honor of visiting, and the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies associated with the Masters, Mates, and Pilots Union, which I have also had the honor of visiting. However, attendance at such facilities can be expensive and require a significant commitment of time that maritime schedules may not allow a mariner to easily make. Further, we need to assess whether current maritime education programs have the capacity to meet the demand of those who are just now entering the maritime industry.

In short, our hearing today is intended to enable us to draw a comprehensive picture of the personnel situation of the U.S. maritime industry. Our examination will inform the future development of policies needed to ensure that our nation has the labor we need to keep maritime commerce flowing, and to ensure that those contemplating working on the water will have the chance to advance along a career path that brings them to new opportunities.

Before I recognize the ranking member, I also want to discuss for a moment a trend in maritime education that is of significant personal interest to me, and that is the growth or, I might say, re-growth of maritime-themed high schools across the nation.

In his written testimony, Captain Art Sulzer, who will appear on our third panel, has presented a very comprehensive discussion of the past history of high school-level maritime education, as well as the successes of and challenges faced by the new maritime-themed high schools being created today.

Shortly after becoming Chair of this Subcommittee, I learned that my own city of Baltimore had established a maritime-themed high school several years ago. After visiting the school, I learned that it had been achieving impressive test results and graduation rates, but the school system had not made the investments necessary to ensure that the school was truly offering a maritime education that could prepare students for work in the maritime industry.

Over the past summer, I have been working closely with a very dedicated group of individuals from the Baltimore maritime community, including former Congresswoman Helen Bentley, to ensure that the promise inherent in the school’s name, Maritime Industries Academy, was fulfilled and that students could receive a maritime education. We have succeeded in revitalizing the school’s Junior Naval ROTC program and have introduced a guest lecture series to bring the maritime community into the school. We are poised to achieve even greater results with the creation of a new advisory board that will guide the school through the process of applying for a charter, which will hopefully give the school the flexibility it needs to support an expansive maritime curriculum.

I want to briefly acknowledge the significant contributions that many of those who are joining us today are making to the development of this project, including: Administrator Connaughton and his staff members, Sharon LeGrand, Shannon Russell, and Richard Corley, who continue to bring the resources of the federal government to support this school. MARAD also put us in touch with Captain Sulzer, who has been a key advisor. I also thank Mr. Mike Rodriguez, Walt Megonigal, and the Master's/Mates/and Pilots Union and its MITAGS institution; Augustin Tellez and the Seafarers International Union; and, Admiral Craine, the President of the New York Maritime Academy, which is creating a new partnership for maritime high schools in which I look forward to having Baltimore Maritime Industries Academy participate.

Every time I visit the school, whose advancement has become a top priority for me, I see first-hand the challenges and the possibilities of maritime education, and I gain the kind of insights into the maritime industry that I frankly have not received from any other source. My experience with this school also makes the subject of today's hearing very personal to me.

I am truly hopeful that school districts around the country can benefit from the lessons that those who are testifying today are learning regarding how best to support the development of maritime schools to open such schools in their local communities.